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# REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE BRITISH NATION.

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Tuesday, February 14. 1710.

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**I**N the mighty Contest that has been, and is now depending, about the preaching up Passive-Obedience and Non-Resistance by Dr. Sacheverell, I observe, Abundance of People please themselves to quote my Lords, the Bishops, now in Being, and the famous Writings of some of the last Bishops of this Church, who are Dead, in which this Doctrine has been justify'd and preach'd up to the World; and to make this the more invidious, we have Advertisements daily publish'd of Books—Sermons re-printed—and Clauses pick'd out of Sermons, by which they say, the Doctrine of Non-Resistance and Passive-Obedience was recogniz'd by the Right Reverend the Bishops, &c. and add their

Names, to encrease, as they think, the Authority of the Thing.

Now, as we have sufficient Arguments against the Doctrine it self, to prove it absurd and ridiculous; such as are drawn from Reason, Custom, Universal Practice, and the Law of Nations; and to prove it inconsistent with our Constitution—Such as Acts of Parliament, Claims of Right, Revolution, Foreign Armies call'd in, &c. So, Gentlemen, these Things merit no Answer—The Cause is not concern'd in the Question, who *was* or *was not* of that Opinion, who did or did not write for it—The Question is short—Is it a Doctrine fit to be preach'd, or is it not? — Is it contrary to our Fundamentals, or is it not?

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Is it condemn'd and exploded by the present Settlement; or is it not? If these Things are the Substance of the Case in hand, then printing the Opinions of the present Reverend Bishops is only a malicious Design of exposing them to the Contempt of the World, as Men that now condemn what they once taught and defended themselves.

As to the Argument, it gives them not one Inch of Advantage; for if ten Thousand Bishops and Doctors had taught it, if all the Homilies of the Church were on its Side, if twenty Ages had practis'd it—Yet if it be against the Laws of GOD, Nature, and the Nation, if it be absurd in it self, and what Man neither can or ought to submit to, all that can be said of those Right Reverend Fathers, is, that they were then mistaken—Nor are their Lordships without a just Defence too, if I may be allow'd to take up that Point, I mean, Defence against the Reproach, whether they have any Defence for the Fact or no, (Viz.) That having by twenty Years contrary Practice declar'd against the Thing, and given sufficient Testimony of their being of another Opinion, and of their having chang'd their Thoughts, it is very unjust to reproach them with the Mistakes of those Times.

It is no Dishonour for any Man, be his Dignity or Reputation for Wisdom ever so great, to acknowledge himself mistaken, when he falls into an Error; it would be much more a Dishonour to continue in that Error, obstinately defending and espousing it: And here, I think, lies the Specifick Difference of our present Parties among the Clergy, whether Bishops or others, (Viz.) That some having been drawn in to the Error, have, like wise Men and Men of Honour, upon clearer Light and better Information, retracted that Error, and testify'd it by a contrary Practice; and the other continue blind, harden'd, and obstinate in a Mistake.

And if this be a Scandal upon our Bishops, that they were once of the Opinion of Dr. Sacheverell, then is it a Reproach upon all our Martyrs and Reformers, that they were once Popish— And just in the same Manner you may defend the

Doctrines of Rome from the Writings and Sermons, even of those Men who burnt at a Stake afterwards for the Reformation, such as *Bilney, Tindal, Frobisher, Cranmer, &c.* But it is written of these Men to their Eternal Honour, that they were mistaken, but being better inform'd, they forsook their Error—And that Scripture may be apply'd to both Cases, *Once were ye Darkness, but now are ye Light in the Lord.*

What sorry Shifts are these Non-Resistance Men driven to, that would justify their Cause, because such and such Men were once for it— Shall I ask them a Question or two?— Do ye, Gentlemen, in this reckon my Lords, the Bishops, to be wise Men or F—s.

If you will say F—s, then you cannot propose them to any Body for Imitation.

If you will say they are wise Men, then their having forsaken this Opinion of yours, it will not be for the Honour of the Opinion to say, that wise Men were once of your Opinion, but have chang'd their Mind.

This, I thought, could not be an improper Note, since I see some People mighty fond of the new Method of Arguing; I think verily, it makes against them in Argument, tho' at the same time it shows very little Respect to the dignify'd Clergy— What they can gather from it, I cannot imagine— But a Reproach upon the Bishops, that they were once in an Error— And it may very readily be answer'd to them, that if their Lordships were of that Opinion once— Then their Lordships were mistaken once— And what then?— Had their Lordships continu'd in that Mistake, as these People have done— The Scandal had stuck to them, as it does to these— But as their Lordships, being better inform'd, came off from that Mistake, and have for twenty Years by a contrary Practice evideñ'd their Sincerity, and that they are convinc'd of the Mistake; 'tis invidious to recite the Opinion they have forsaken, and serves the Gentlemen to no End at all, but to bring the Authority

ty of my Lords, the Bishps, against them, who having been of their Opinion, in the Days when Court-Delusions prevail'd, have obey'd the Conviction of their Consciences, and come off from the Mistakes they were formerly guilty of,

Indeed this Conversion of the Nation from the Delusions of Tyranny was owing to the Revolution; then it was, we first saw the Value of Liberty, and the Right we had to it by the Laws both of Nature and the Nation, and the asserting that Right brought the Revolution to pass: Whoever he be, that now pretends to assert again this abdicated Doctrine, he flies in the Face of the Revolution; 'tis no Matter what we were before, or what any Man's Opinion was before, be he Bishop or what he will, we are all of another Mind now, and have been so for twenty Years; and a Practice of twenty Years, contradicting a former Opinion, may in any reasonable Man's Judgment atone for Mistakes committed so long ago.

The Doctrine, that has been advanc'd by the late Sermon of Dr. Sacheverell, is of that Consequence, that really I see no

Medium between absolute Bondage, and an effectual Censure of it; either this Doctrine must fall, or the Constitution must sink; either Resistance is lawful, or the present Foundation is blown up, and the Government we have settled is a Usurpation: And we may thank the Doctor for bringing Things to this Necessity, That the Government must be recogniz'd, and this Doctrine blasted and overthrown; or this Doctrine being recogniz'd, the present Constitution must fall to the Ground, and be acknowledg'd a rebellious Invasion upon a Divine Original Right of another —— And methinks the Gentlemen that pretend to say, the Parliament would drop this Prosecution, and make nothing of it, might consider, that the Reverend Doctor has oblig'd them to pursue it, and they cannot show him any Favour; since, if the House should slack their Hand in the effectual Prosecution of this Monster, they erect their own Destroyer, and give the Party such a Lift, that as they are already insolent enough, they would soon insult the Parliament it self, as they now do the whole Nation.

## MISCELLANEA.

ONE Word more for poor Insolvents now, and a Blessing be upon all those that give them a Hand or a Vote in their Distress, to deliver the Miserable from the Hand of the Oppressor — We are a Nation of Liberty, and it seems hard, that no Remains of Tyranny are to be seen among us, but that of the Creditor over the Debtor; and this rages to a terrible Extremity.

And yet mistake me not; I am not pleading for a Liberty to Frauds, and Encouragement to Men to turn Bankrupts, GOD forbid! I only argue, that the Measures of Punishment upon the Person of the Debtor, when it can legally appear, that he is really and *bona fide* unable to pay, should not be in the Breast of the Creditor, but in the Breast of the Law, that is, of the Judges and Magistrates, with whom the Execution of the Law is entrusted.

But for the present it is otherwise; The Escape-Warrant commits the Prisoner without Bail, at the meer Mercy of the Debtor; and tho' he should not have Bread to eat, yet he may commit him for Life—and he shall never come out, but as the cruel Creditor pleases to direct — Again, the late Act for Bankrupts leaves the Debtor in the Hand of the Creditor, he must surrender upon Oath all his Effects, and is liable to be hang'd if he does not; yet he shall have no Discharge, unless Four Fifth Parts of the Creditors comply to certify for him.

All these Circumstances leave the Life of the Debtor in the Hand of the Creditor; and methinks there is somewhat in that, which shocks and jostles so with the Word English Liberty, that it looks, as if the Debtor, immediately upon his being Insolvent,